



Helping to Create the World of Tomorrow

Capturing GDN Community Input for UNESCO on the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education



THE
GDN
NETWORK

Primer brief

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1. Purpose of the Workshop

The GDN Network will be holding a UNESCO feature presentation and roundtable at the Oslo Annual Meeting to share and subsequently collect and synthesize input from its global membership to feed into UNESCO's processes around ratification and implementation of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education ("Global Convention").

For the GDN community, the focus is on how the Convention can support, in development contexts, progress in:

- Digitization (digital credentials, data portability, digital recognition)
- Lifelong learning (inclusive recognition of formal, non-formal, informal learning; recognition of prior learning; flexible modular learning)
- Workforce skills development (aligning qualifications with labour market needs; enabling mobility; supporting reskilling)
- Recognition (fair, transparent, non-discriminatory recognition; recognition of refugees; handling missing documentation; cross-border credential recognition)

This primer is meant to help participants come prepared with grounded questions, reflections, and examples from their contexts.



2. What is the UNESCO Global Convention?

The Global Convention was adopted by UNESCO Member States in 2019 and entered into force on 5 March 2023, after the requisite 20 instruments of ratification were deposited (UNESCO, 2025). It is the first global legal instrument dedicated to recognition of higher education qualifications, complementing UNESCO's five regional recognition conventions (UNESCO, 2019).

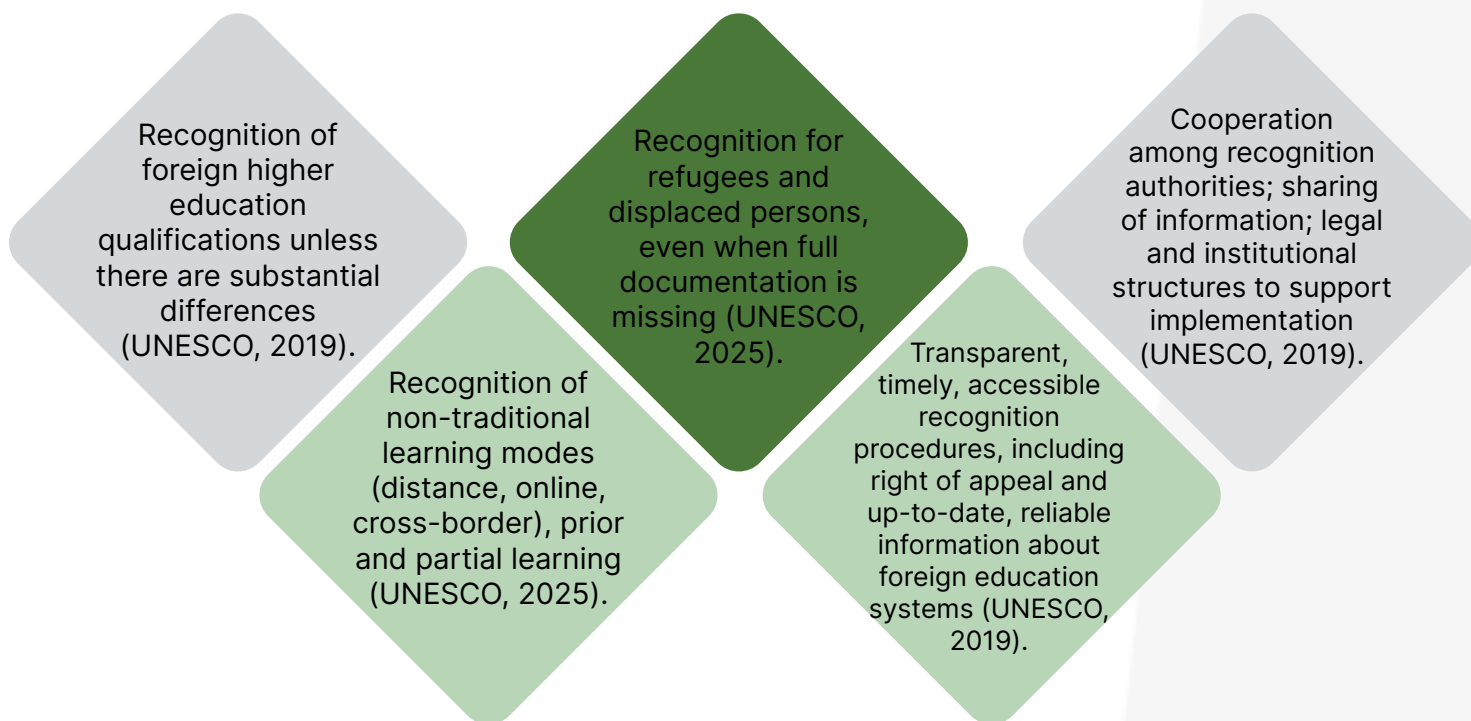
Its aims are to:

Promote fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory recognition of qualifications across all States Parties.

Facilitate academic mobility and strengthen mutual trust among higher education systems.

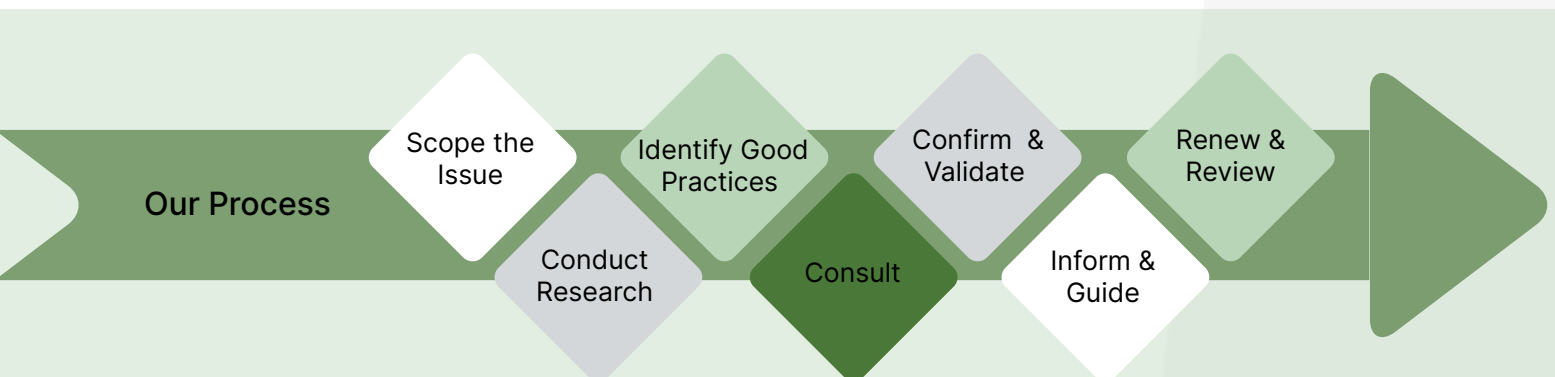
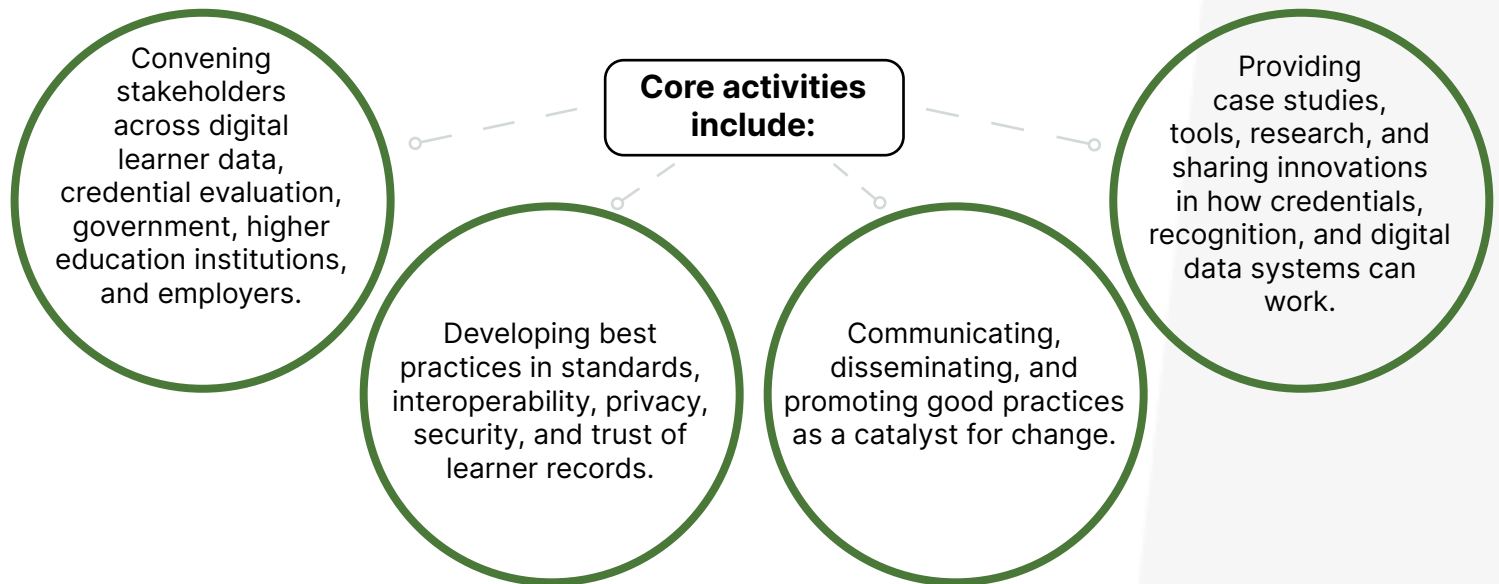
Broaden access to higher education and lifelong learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2025).

Key provisions of note for the GDN community include:



3. What is the Groningen Declaration Network (GDN)?

GDN is a voluntary, nonprofit network committed to enabling digital learner/student data portability. Its vision is that citizens globally should be able to consult and share their authentic educational data safely, securely, and with autonomy.



4. Why Change Is Needed: The Case for the Global Convention

Despite increasing mobility, digital learning, migration, and demand for lifelong learning, many learners face obstacles that limit the recognition of their qualifications. The Global Convention seeks to address system-level issues to unlock these barriers. Below are some concrete examples that illustrate the need, followed by known barriers. These cases show both the potential of innovations aligned with the Convention's aims and the obstacles that remain.

Examples of Challenges & Change in Practice

Refugee Inclusion in Chad — The government has passed laws to define refugee status and integrating camp schools into the national education system. Still, more is needed to include refugee data in the recognised education systems. For example, while refugees receive provisional certificates or ID cards, there are technical, data-collection, human resource, and coordination barriers that limit full recognition and inclusion in national education planning (UNESCO, 2023).

European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) — The EQPR is a methodology piloted in Europe to assess qualifications held by refugees in situations where documentation is missing or incomplete. It involves assessment via interviews, evaluator panels from National Information Centres (ENICs/NARICs), plus explanatory and advisory sections. It has enabled refugees to continue studies or move into employment in host countries by providing credible assessments of their prior qualifications (Council of Europe & UNHCR, n.d.). This model shows practical ways to implement parts of what the Convention requires (European Qualifications Passport for Refugees, n.d.).

Digital Credential Verification — Morocco's BlockMEDC has developed a blockchain-powered academic credential verification system ("BlockMEDC") to secure the issuance, verification, and revocation of academic credentials, automating processes that were previously manual and slow, and improving transparency and trust. This example demonstrates how digital tools can help reduce delays, tampering, and trust deficits in recognition processes (Fartitchou et al, 2024).

Bangladesh ShikkhaChain — In Bangladesh, a prototype platform called ShikkhaChain being developed uses blockchain and off-chain storage (IPFS) to enable secure issue, verification, and revocation of academic credentials. It aims to make verification more efficient, more tamper-resistant, and more credible for both domestic and international recognition (Farabi et al, 2025).

4. Why Change Is Needed: The Case for the Global Convention

Known Barriers to Ratification & Implementation

Barrier	Description
Lack of awareness / policy commitment	Some countries have not ratified the Convention or do not have national recognition authorities with sufficient mandate or visibility. Without this type of commitment, implementation can lag.
Resource constraints	Financial, technical, human resources are often limited. For example, in Chad, capacity and coordination challenges limit inclusion of refugee-data in EMIS (UNESCO, 2023).
Standardization & interoperability issues	Different countries have different standards, frameworks, level descriptors; comparing and interpreting qualifications (especially non-traditional or informal learning) can be difficult. Digital credentials may not be accepted across jurisdictions without common metadata, mutual trust, or mechanisms for verification.
Documentation challenges	Refugees, displaced persons, or people from under-resourced regions may have incomplete or missing documentation; processes may be rigid or require official documents not available. The EQPR example shows one pathway, but many systems have no such mechanism (EQPR, n.d.).
Trust, credibility, and recognition by stakeholders	Employers, institutions, and recognition authorities may question the validity of new modalities (online, non-formal, blockchain-based verification). They may not trust digital credentials or assessments without well-known institutions backing them.
Digital divide and infrastructure limits	Poor internet connectivity, lack of reliable power, or absence of trusted verification platforms can block digitization efforts. Also, data privacy, regulatory frameworks, and legal protections for data are at times considered weak (Fartitchou et al., 2024; Farabi et al., 2025).
Equity and fair processes	If recognition isn't designed with equity in mind, marginalized groups (refugees, migrants, women, rural learners) may be excluded. Language barriers, lack of legal protections, or costs associated with recognition or verification can be prohibitive.

5. Relevance of the Global Convention to GDN's Work (reinforced with examples)

The Global Convention aligns with and amplifies the type of potential areas of focus that align with the principles of the GDN.

These examples illustrate select models for consideration.

Digital Credentials & Data Portability

BlockMEDC in Morocco and ShikkhaChain in Bangladesh show how digital systems can improve verification, security, trust, and speed. The Convention's provisions for recognizing non-traditional and digital learning lend legitimacy to these efforts.

Recognition for Refugees / Vulnerable Learners

The EQPR allows refugees with incomplete documents to have qualifications assessed, which demonstrates how Convention obligations (e.g., for refugees, for missing documentation) can be operationalized. The Chad case shows both how inclusion can advance and how barriers remain.

Workforce Skills / Lifelong Learning

When qualifications are recognized (even informally or non-traditionally), learners are more able to enter jobs or further training. This helps address skills mismatches. The Morocco/Bangladesh digital verification systems can help ensure that credentials are trusted by employers.

Equity & Inclusion Systems

Equity and inclusion systems that account for missing documentation, transparently assess prior or informal learning, and ensure accessibility (digital, procedural, cost) are essential for inclusion. Examples such as Chad and EQPR show what is possible when inclusive practices are adopted.

6. Status of Ratification & Implementation

As of April 2025, 38 States have ratified the Global Convention (UNESCO, 2025). While ratification is underway, implementation (i.e. setting up recognition authorities, procedures, information sharing, digitization, recognizing lifelong learning) requires supportive policy, technical capacity, legal frameworks, and funding. The examples above highlight pockets of innovation.

7. Guiding Questions for the Workshop

1. In your country or region, do examples exist similar to the examples above (refugee inclusion, EQPR-type assessments, digital credential systems) or are analogue versions evident? What can be learned or adapted?

2. What is the readiness of your recognition systems for non-traditional learning, online/distance credentials, prior/informal learning?

3. What digital infrastructure, legal, regulatory, human resource, or funding gaps exist that need addressing?

4. How can broader access be more centrally embedded (refugees, migrants, learners with missing documentation, rural/remote communities, workforce learning)?

5. What forms of cooperation / international / regional mutual recognition / credential assessment would help in your context?



8. Call to Action for the GDN Community



Document & share your own examples (cases, pilot projects, successes/failures) related to recognition, digitization, refugee inclusion, workforce skills pathways.

Advocate in your national and institutional contexts for ratification of the Convention (if not yet ratified) and for aligning national policies with Convention provisions. And where ratification is not possible, working towards alignment.

Participate in standard-setting: help develop, test, and promote interoperable credential metadata, verification protocols, assessment methods.

Support capacity building in regions or countries where systems are weak—train recognition authorities, support digital platforms, strengthen regulatory oversight, enhance competency and quality assurance frameworks and alignment.

Ensure inclusivity in design: when recognition and digitization policies are developed, ensure learners, including Indigenous, marginalized learners, and those without full documentation are part of the design conversations.

Monitor implementation: track how recognition outcomes are changing (timeliness, fairness, inclusion, digital vs manual processes) in your local or national systems; report back so that GDN can compile learning and feed into UNESCO's work.

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